

The Writer's Toolkit:

Essential Techniques for the

LOGLINE

LEARN HOW TO CRAFT A COMPELLING LOGLINE AND HOW TO RECOGNIZE WHEN YOUR
NARRATIVE MAY BE FALLING SHORT.



michele shiflett

The Foundation of Logline

What is a logline?

A logline is a succinct yet powerful summary of a story that encapsulates its essence in a single, captivating sentence or two. It serves not only as a tool for writers to clarify their own narrative vision but also as a pitch to engage potential readers, producers, or agents. A well-crafted logline distills the core conflict, central characters, and unique premise of a story, providing a glimpse into the heart of the narrative.

At its core, a logline should answer three fundamental questions: Who is the protagonist? What do they want? What stands in their way? By addressing these elements, writers can create a compelling hook that piques interest and invites further exploration of the story.

Creating an effective logline can be an illuminating exercise in itself, pushing writers to condense their sprawling narratives into a concise format. This process encourages clarity and focus, helping to identify the story's thematic core and driving forces. As writers grapple with their loglines, they often uncover fresh insights about their characters and plot, allowing for deeper character development and more robust storytelling. This clarity can be invaluable when navigating the complexities of fiction, as it provides a roadmap that can guide the writing process.

Moreover, a strong logline can be a powerful marketing tool. In a world inundated with stories, a captivating logline can make your work stand out, enticing potential readers or viewers to learn more.

Understanding the basics of writing a logline

1. Writing a logline is one of the most crucial steps in the storytelling process, serving as both a compass and a marketing tool for your narrative.

A logline encapsulates the essence of your story in a single, compelling sentence, capturing the main character, their goal, and the central conflict. This brief yet powerful summary not only helps you clarify your vision but also provides a captivating hook for potential readers or producers. Understanding how to craft an effective logline is an essential skill for any writer, author, or producer seeking to make their story resonate.

2. To begin writing a logline, focus on the core elements of your story.

Protagonist

Objective or Goal

Obstacles (Central Conflict)

This triad forms the backbone of your logline. Before adding other elements to your logline such as, world, you should firmly have the triad in place.

The Writer's Toolkit: Essential Techniques for the LOGLINE

3. Aim for brevity and impact. A logline should ideally be one or no more than two sentences long, yet it must carry the weight of your entire narrative. Strive to eliminate any unnecessary words or complex phrases that might dilute its power. Instead, choose vivid language that evokes emotion and curiosity. The goal is to create a sense of urgency and intrigue, prompting readers or producers to want to learn more about your story.

Finally, remember that writing a logline is not a one-and-done process. It's a skill that can be honed and refined. Don't hesitate to revisit and revise your logline as your story evolves.

The Framework!!

A logline should always be about the PROTAGONIST.

When [INCITING EVENT] happens to Protag, he/she must [DO SOMETHING] in order to reach [STORY GOAL]

PROTAG - EVENT - ACTIVE - GOAL

Protagonist/ Flaw - What are they struggling with...what personality flaw contributes to their struggle? Protagonist and flaw: What does the protagonist need to overcome? What is their struggle?

- Emotionally: An over-protective dad
- Professionally: A compulsive lying lawyer

The logline should indicate how the character needs to change. Flaw=Conflict. A lazy protag needs to take action in their life. A lying lawyer needs to be honest. Every story needs a central conflict!

INCITING INCIDENT The EVENT that changes the protagonist's ordinary world.

BREAKING BAD: When he's diagnosed with terminal cancer...

LIAR LIAR: When a compulsive lying lawyer has to tell the truth for 24 hours...

FINDING NEMO: When his son is taken by scuba divers...

GOAL: Protagonist's Main Story Objective DESIRE: What Protagonist Wants What is the Goal & what they're doing to achieve it?

What is their Desire & what they're doing to resolve it.

BREAKING BAD: to secure his family's financial well-being.

LIAR LIAR: to make partner at his law firm (his desire but not need)

FINDING NEMO: to get his son back.

WORLD Is the world significant to the plot? Period/Futuristic/Dystopian: should be noted in the logline. If it's not Present Day, it should also be noted in the logline. In 1960's New York...

The Writer's Toolkit: Essential Techniques for the LOGLINE

Examples:

When scuba divers take his son, an overprotective father clownfish must cross the treacherous ocean to find him. (Finding Nemo)

A compulsive lying lawyer risks losing his career when he is unable to lie for 24 hours. (Liar Liar)

A meek chemistry teacher recently diagnosed with cancer turns to the meth world to secure his family's financial future. (Breaking Bad)

One last thing... when you become more comfortable crafting loglines, there's one more element that could be included. STAKES.

But remember, execs would rather read a clear, concise logline over a meandering one.

Example of including stakes. A compulsive lying lawyer risks losing his career when he is unable to lie for 24 hours. When cursed by his son's birthday wish, a corrupt lawyer must navigate 24 hours without lying or lose his career and his son.

How your logline and story structure are connected.

In the realm of storytelling, your logline serves as the compass guiding your narrative journey. A well-crafted logline succinctly encapsulates the essence of your story, presenting the main character, their goal, and the conflict they face. This brief yet powerful statement is not just a marketing tool; it is a foundational element that influences every aspect of your story structure. By understanding how your logline and story structure are intertwined, you can create a more cohesive and compelling narrative that resonates with your audience.

As you construct your story structure, consider how each plot point relates back to your logline. The inciting incident should directly connect to the protagonist's goal, setting them on a path that mirrors the stakes outlined in your logline. Similarly, the climax should reflect the culmination of the conflict introduced at the beginning. By maintaining this connection, you create a satisfying narrative arc that feels both inevitable and surprising, drawing readers in and keeping them engaged from start to finish.

Ultimately, the relationship between your logline and story structure is a dynamic one, influencing how you craft your narrative. Embrace this connection as a vital part of your writing process.

Crafting a logline is an art that combines clarity with creativity. By focusing on the protagonist, the central conflict, the setting, and the unique elements of your story, you can create a powerful tool that captures the essence of your narrative in just a few sentences.